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Sunday Reading.

THE

TOUCHSTONE;

OR, THE

WAY to know a TRUE CHRISTIAN.

BEING

A Deſcription of the Character of our bleſſed SAVIOR, with an Inquiry whether we are like Him. To which is added, An Appeal firſt to INFIDELS, and then to Perſons who call themſelves by the Name of CHRISTIANS.

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THE

TOUCHSTONE, &c.

IN this Chriſtian Country, or at leaſt among the more Chriſtian part of it, the duty of imitating him by whoſe name we call ourſelves is a point which muſt be allowed to be clear. I think it muſt alſo be admitted by all who conſider themſelves as Chriſtians, that in proportion as a man differs from his Savior, and turns away from the conſideration of his Character and Conduct, in the ſame proportion does he depart from true goodneſs, and betray the unſoundneſs of his whole Chriſtian profeſſion.

We ſhall proceed, without further preface, to ſpeak of a few of thoſe tempers and diſpoſitions which moſt remarkably diſtinguiſhed our bleſſed Lord, and they ſhall be the following.

Firſt. He was remarkable for his *condeſcenſion and humility*, and for his indifference to worldly praiſe. He ſought not honor from men: he never aimed at earthly diſtinction or ſuperiority, but ſubmitted willingly to be conſidered as one of the meaneſt of the people. No lofty high minded thoughts, no aſpiring deſires were harboured in his breaſt. He made himſelf "of no reputation," and appeared as the ſervant of all. It was moſt wonderful condeſcenſion in Chriſt, who is ſpoken of in Scripture as "coming down from heaven," and as having partaken in "the glory of the Father before the world was," even to viſit this world at all. It was ſtill greater condeſcenſion to viſit us in the character of a man like ourſelves;

but the condeſcenſion is increaſed to a ſtill more aſtoniſhing pitch, by appearing among us even as the pooreſt and moſt deſpiſed of mankind. He was deſtitute of ſuch common conveniences as even the loweſt have. "The foxes have "holes, and the birds of the air have neſts, "but the Son of Man had not where to lay "his head." We find him condeſcending to waſh his diſciples' feet, and alſo warning them not to conſider themſelves as true Believers in him if they "ſought honor one of another:" at another time we find him admoniſhing them to be "poor in ſpirit," and at another "not to chuſe "the higheſt place," but willingly and contentedly to take the loweſt till they ſhould be called up higher, aſſuring them that it was a maxim in his kingdom, "that every one that exalteth himſelf "ſhall be abaſed, but he that humbleth himſelf "ſhall be exalted."

Secondly, Our Savior was alſo endued with the greateſt *meekneſs and patience*. No haſtineſs of ſpirit; no raſh anger or reſentment was found in him. His ſoul was meek and gentle as a lamb: all the trials, affronts, and injuries which he met with were ſubmitted to by him patiently, without the leaſt murmuring or repining. "He "gave his back to the ſmiters, and his cheeks "to them that plucked off the hair." "He "hid not his face from ſhame and ſpitting." "He was oppreſſed, and he was afflicted, yet he "opened not his mouth." "He was brought "as a lamb to the ſlaughter, and as a ſheep "before his ſhearers is dumb, ſo he opened not "his mouth." St. Peter tells us, that "when

" he was reviled he reviled not again, when he " ſuffered he threatened not, but committed him- " ſelf to him that judgeth righteouſly," and his own admonition to his followers is, " Take my " yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am " meek and lowly in heart, and ye ſhall find reſt " for your ſouls." When his enemies treated him with the greateſt unkindneſs and cruelty he returned them good for evil, and ſought to promote their happineſs and ſalvation. So far was his mind from harbouring any malice or revenge, that he prayed even for his murderers, and recommended them to the Divine Mercy, ſaying, " Father forgive them, for they know not what " they do."

Thirdly, The mind of Chriſt was alſo filled with the tendereſt *compaſſion and love*. This was manifeſted throughout his whole conduct, by the kind attention he ſhewed both to the bodies and ſouls of men. He went about doing good," relieving the helpleſs, healing the diſeaſed, and comforting the afflicted. He alſo inſtructed the ignorant, and " gave light to them that ſat in darkneſs and in the ſhadow of death." The poor guilty ſinner found him a friend indeed. We never read of any ſinner turning from his ſins, and calling upon Chriſt, without receiving an anſwer of peace, ſo that our Savior ſhewed by his conduct that he came, as he himſelf expreſſes it, " to ſeek and to " ſave that which was loſt." He is repreſented in Scripture as one who was always labouring to promote the Salvation of thoſe around him; and when men would not hearken to his words, but determined ſtill to go on in their ſins, his ſoul pitied them, and he was " grieved for their hardneſs of

" heart." How fully does his pathetic Lamentation over devoted Jeruſalem ſpeak the compaſſionate affection of his mind! " O Jeruſalem! " Jeruſalem! thou that killeſt the Prophets, and " ſtoneſt them that are ſent unto thee; how often " would I have gathered thy children together, " even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her " wing, and ye would not."

But his love was ſhewn moſt eminently in his laying down his life for us: as he ſpeaks, " Greater " Love hath no man than this, that a man lay " down his life for his friends." This great inſtance of love he ſhewed, yet this was not all: He laid down his life for his *enemies*. St. Paul ſays, " When we were yet without ſtrength," (or when we had fallen ſo as to be utterly helpleſs and ruined) " in due time Chriſt died for the " ungodly. For ſcarcely for a righteous man " would one die, yet peradventure for a good " man ſome would even dare to die. But God " commendeth his love towards us, in that while " we were yet ſinners Chriſt died for us." Herein is love beyond example. We read of ſome who have been induced to die for their country or their friends, but where have we heard or read of any one, except Jeſus Chriſt, who has willingly died for his enemies; for thoſe who offended and cruelly injured him.

Fourthly. Chriſt was remarkable for the moſt perfect *obedience and reſignation to the will of God*.

" I came down from heaven, he ſaith, not to " do mine own will. but the will of him that ſent " me. And I muſt work the work of him that " ſent me while it is day, the night cometh when

"no man can work." At twelve years old we find him diligently employed in purſuing the great object for which God ſent him into the world, reaſoning with and queſtioning the Jewiſh Doctors in the Temple. When his mother inquired of him concerning the reaſon of his conduct, his anſwer was, "Wiſt ye not that I muſt be about my "father's buſineſs:" He was more intent on obeying God than on receiving his daily food. "I "have meat to eat," ſaid he, "which the world "knows not of," and immediately after he adds, "my meat is to do the will of God, and to finiſh "the work which he hath given me to do." And as he was active in performing, ſo was he alſo patient in ſuffering whatever God required. All the ſevere trials and afflictions which Chriſt endured, were endured without reluctance or repining, becauſe he knew that they came upon him by Divine appointment. Even when his laſt bitter ſufferings drew near, and his human Nature ſhuddered at the proſpect of them, hear with what obedient reſignation he prayed: "Now is my ſoul troubled, "and what ſhall I ſay, Father, ſave me from this "hour; but for this cauſe came I unto this hour. "Father, glorify thy name.—Father, if thou be "willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheleſs, "not my will but thine be done."

If there were room to enlarge on this ſubject, we might proceed to ſpeak of our Savior's ſpotleſs purity, of his unſhaken faith and truſt in God, of his noble courage in the cauſe of truth, and alſo of his ardent devotion, as well as many other ſhining excellencies in his character; but it is the leſs neceſſary, becauſe they are partly implied in the tempers already treated of.

And now let me put a very ſimple queſtion to the reader. Who are they that are the true Diſciples of this Jeſus Chriſt? The anſwer is eaſy. The true Diſciples are thoſe undoubtedly who moſt nearly reſemble that character of Chriſt which has been ſpoken of. Thoſe are not the true Chriſtians who merely call themſelves ſuch. Again, thoſe are not the true Chriſtrians, who, though they believe and affirm the Bible to be true, yet never read it, and know nothing of what is contained in it. Again, thoſe are not the true Chriſtians who though they may read the Bible, and though they can prove by argument that it is no impoſture, are nevertheleſs no better for all this knowledge. Again, they are not the true Chriſtians who have had Chriſtian baptiſm, who attend at Chriſtian worſhip, and receive every month the Chriſtian Sacrament, and who are orthodox even in their Creed, and can ſee the errors into which other men fall on theſe ſubjects; for a man may ſtill want the main thing which Chriſtianity conſiſts in, I mean he may want a reſemblance to Chriſt in his turn of Character, and temper, and ſpirit. But in order to bring this whole ſubject more diſtinctly home to the Reader, let us again briefly touch on the ſeveral tempers that were ſpoken of.

Firſt, then your Savior was remarkable for his condeſcenſion, humility, and indifference to worldy praiſe. Are you diſtinguiſhed by the ſame diſpoſitions? Are you willing to drop down from your rank in life, as Chriſt did from his celeſtial dignity? Are you contented alſo with a low eſtate as he was? And is your heart deadened like his to the deſire of worldly praiſe and reputation? Is this, I ſay, your character? Or, on the contrary, are

you one of thoſe Chriſtians who make a point of not ſtooping to any employment that is judged beneath them, and who are continually aiming at high acquaintance, whoſe great anxiety is alſo to fare plentifully in this world, and who, in ſhort, are in full chace of wealth as well as reputation, honor, and preferment? This is one teſt by which you are to judge whether you are a Chriſtian.

Secondly. We ſpoke of the meekneſs and patience of Chriſt. When he was "reviled he reviled not again." His ſoul, as we obſerved, was meek and gentle as a lamb. Is this alſo your character? Has your natural temper, if it is haſty, been brought under, ſo that affronts and injuries do not much ruffle you? Are you not made violent in your ſpirit by the violence of thoſe who are oppoſed to you? How do you feel, for inſtance, towards men of an oppoſite nation, or of a contrary party to you in politics, or of another ſect in religion? Chriſt died for his enemies; how do you feel towards all your enemies? Do you bear the evils of life alſo as Chriſt did, without murmuring and complaining, ſubmitting cheerfully to a hard and humble lot if it be the will of your heavenly Father?

Thirdly. Chriſt was full of tender compaſſion and love, both to the bodies and ſouls of men. How ſtands the likeneſs in theſe particulars? For inſtance, what part of your time and money do you give to the relief of men's bodily diſtreſſes? Is your character that of a father to the fatherleſs, a viſitor of the ſick, a benefactor to the poor, and a comforter of the afflicted? Do you, like your Savior, "go about doing good?" How do you act alſo towards thoſe who are of bad character in

the world, and who have treſpaſſed, as ſome judge, paſt all forgiveneſs? Does your benevolence embrace even theſe outcaſts alſo? It was one of the reproaches caſt on Chriſt by the Phariſees, that he ſtooped too low in this reſpect, and that he ſeemed to take the part of wicked and undeſerving people. "Behold!" ſaid they "a friend to Publicans and Sinners," and again, "this woman is a Sinner." Are you in like manner a friend to the moſt diſcreditable kind of Sinners? Is the idea of their unworthineſs no argument with you for declining an opportunity of doing them good? Do you take their part and not deſpair of them, notwithſtanding the ſneers of ſome unchriſtian people? Or, on the contrary, does the dread of ſuffering in your own reputation continually check you in the juſt exerciſe of your beneficence?

But the love of Chriſt had reſpect chiefly to the ſouls of men. Are you chiefly concerned about their ſouls alſo? Do you do what in you lieth to promote men's eternal intereſts? Do you labour to enlighten, to inſtruct, to invite, and to warn men with all earneſtneſs as Chriſt did? And do you weep over the caſe of impenitent Sinners, as your Savior wept over Jeruſalem? Or, on the contrary, are you one of thoſe who make light of men's ſpiritual intereſts, who ſeem almoſt to forget that their fellow-creatures have immortal ſouls, and who at the utmoſt can only be prevailed on to ſhew a little humanity to their bodies?

Fourthly. Chriſt was remarkable for his obedience and reſignation to the will of God. He evidently lived only for the purpoſe of doing the will of his heavenly Father. Is this the propoſed end of your living? Do you conſider all your employ-

ments in this life as the fulfilling of a work which God hath given you to do, and do you labour to know his will in order to your thus fulfilling it? Or, on the contrary, are you one of those who never think of God's will, but go their own way and say, they have a right to please themselves provided they commit no great crime against their neighbour. And again, when crosses or troubles come upon you do you bear them with resignation, considering them to be sent by God, or are you impatient until they are removed, reversing on such occasions the language of your Savior and saying, "Not thy will, O Lord! but mine be done."

On the subject of our Savior's holiness and purity, his unshaken faith and trust in God, his boldness in the cause of truth, and his ardent devotion, as well as his other excellencies, we will not attempt to enter here. Let it be remembered, however, that it is the part of a true Christian to trace out the whole character of his Savior, and to imitate him in every one of those points in which the Scriptures set him forth as our example.

And now let us make an appeal in a few words to two or three different descriptions of people. And first to the downright Infidel. You are one who disbelieve in Christ; but you are one that has duly weighed and considered his character? What is the fault you find in it? When the unbelieving Jews once took up stones to cast at Jesus, he answered them by saying, "Many good works have "I shewed you from my Father, and for which of "these good works do you stone me?" And so it may be said to you now. Many excellencies in Christ's character have been set before you, and for which of these is it that you disbelieve in him?

Surely you cannot deny that there is ſomething very excellent, and unimpeachable, ſomething very pure and holy, ſomething alſo very original, ſomething in ſhort that looks very like divine in the character that has been ſpoken of, nor can there be any doubt of the tendency of the diſpoſitions which have been deſcribed to promote the peace and happineſs of mankind. When therefore one man ſcoffs, when another gravely diſbelieves, when a third doubts about Chriſtianity; when difficulties riſe up in the minds of ſome, and when profane and blaſpheming books are ſpread abroad to overthrow the faith of others, to all this hoſt of unbelievers we beg leave in this place ſimply to reply, by oppoſing to them the character of Jeſus Chriſt, a character which thoſe who are the moſt violent in running down Chriſtianity, will be found I believe in general, to take very little trouble in conſidering.

When thoſe unbelieving Jews of old who were ſo bent on crucifying Chriſt were aſked, "Why, "what evil hath he done?" the grand difficulty was, to get them to give their attention fairly to the character of the priſoner; the multitude of them, when this very reaſonable queſtion was aſked, are ſaid to have returned to their general abuſe, and to have "only cried out the more let him be cru-"cified; but when Pilate, though diſpoſed to ſide with the Jews, was obliged by his office to examine and croſs-examine this Jeſus, "Verily," ſaid Pilate, "I find no fault in him."—Our preſent difficulty is much the ſame; for if we could but perſuade our modern Infidels and Blaſphemers to beſtow for once a little time in examining, point by point, the character of this Jeſus of Nazareth as

Pilate did, methinks they would be glad to wash their hands alſo, like Pilate, of the blame of being his more forward enemies: they would turn over at leaſt the heavier part of the guilt to the rabble of more uninformed perſons ſaying, like Pilate after the examination, "Take ye him and crucify him."

But let us next addreſs the merely nominal and falſe Chriſtians. Now, theſe are the perſons who, though ſome of them lament perhaps the preſent growth of infidelity, have been the principal cauſes of it. Not a few of theſe Chriſtians ſo called are, it is to be feared, men even of immoral character, and theſe muſt be named among the beſt friends of infidelity, for the corrupt life of one who calls himſelf a Chriſtian, is certainly the greateſt of all encouragements to the unbelievers. But let us not confine our obſervations to immoral Chriſtians only. You are certainly a promoter of Infidelity if you do but fail of having that peculiar temper and turn of mind which has been deſcribed. I will ſuppoſe now that you are a decent moral perſon—But muſt we not own that ſo alſo are many of the Infidels—honourable—ſo are the Infidels—humane, perhaps handſome in your conduct, and very reſpectable—but ſo alſo are many of the Infidels. If this then be all, you have nothing in your character but what is common both to you and them, and an Infidel at this rate is juſt as good as a Chriſtian; and if as good he muſt be as ſafe alſo—ſurely then there is no need of Chriſtianity: and if there is no need of it there ariſes a ſtrong ſuſpicion alſo that there is no truth in it; for to ſuppoſe Chriſtianity to be true, and ſent of God, as it profeſſes to be, while nevertheleſs there is no need of it, and while the fol-

lowers of it are no better than the Unbelievers, is to ſuppoſe that God acts fooliſhly and in vain, which ſuppoſition is itſelf a kind of Infidelity, and is an approach even to Atheiſm. It follows, therefore, that in order to defend the truth of Chriſtianity, it is neceſſary to exclude out of the pale of the true Chriſtian Church every ſuch merely decent Chriſtian as I have been ſpeaking of, ſaying to him (as all ſerious Chriſtians indeed are uſed to do) that you have no ſhare in the privileges of the Goſpel any more than the Unbelievers, and if "he that believeth not ſhall be condemned," then you it is to be feared are involved in the ſame condemnation.

We cannot help obſerving, that Chriſtians of this merely decent claſs, eſpecially if poſſeſſed of a little orthodoxy alſo, are not ſeldom the perſons who cry out moſt violently againſt Infidelity, and who perhaps come forward in defence of the national faith, as if theſe were the beſt Champions by whom the truths of Chriſt can be defended; whereas I think I have ſhewn, that they are ſome of the very perſons who have betrayed the cauſe, and have ſurrendered up the ark of our moſt holy faith into the hands of the modern Philiſtines.

Let us next addreſs another claſs of perſons, I mean thoſe who are very remarkable for their attachment to certain Chriſtian Doctrines, and are very zealous for what they call the Goſpel. Some of theſe perhaps carry their zeal for doctrines ſo far, that they feel but little intereſt in any thing that can be ſaid concerning the example of Chriſt, and are ready to turn away from what they call ſo merely moral a leſſon. They deſire to hear of nothing elſe than the "blood and

"righteouſneſs of Chriſt," and his atonement, and grace, and interceſſion. But has not the ſame Scripture which ſpeaks on theſe ſubjects ſaid alſo, "Let the ſame *mind* be in you which was alſo "in Chriſt Jeſus, and that Chriſt hath ſet us an "example that we ſhould tread in his ſteps:" and again, "that he that ſaith he abideth in him "ought himſelf ſo to walk even as he walked:" and again, "that if any man have not the Spirit "of Chriſt," (which certainly muſt include the temper of Chriſt) "he is none of his." A plain ſcriptural declaration of the Character of Chriſt, and an appeal to thoſe texts which aſſert the neceſſity of being like him in our own character and conduct, may be of admirable uſe in pulling down the vain confidence of the Enthuſiaſt, in rectifying many errors of the Bigot, in expoſing the ſinful paſſions of ſome who pretend that they are magnifying Chriſt, in proving in ſhort the faith of all, and in calming many political as well as religious controverſies of the Chriſtian Church.

But once more. Theſe are ſome who think indeed that they copy after Chriſt, and that they copy him the more becauſe they make light of doctrines and beſtow their whole attention upon practice. But what is their practice? Are they cloſe and real imitators of all theſe holy tempers of Jeſus? I fear thoſe who neglect or pervert the doctrinal parts of Scripture in order to ſuit their own creed, are prone equally to forget or lower what is practical in Scripture in order to ſuit their own practice: many take, for inſtance, only a part of Chriſt's example inſtead of the whole of it, and even what they take they lower and deprive of all the ſpirit that is in it before

they can agree to it: thus they may poſſibly imitate Chriſt's benevolence to the bodies of men, but even this is done only in ſome ſmall degree, for they cannot be ſaid to "go about doing good," as Chriſt did, making their benevolence their buſineſs, and quitting their home, like him, in ſearch of wretched people; and as to Chriſt's benevolence to the *ſouls* of men they hardly think of it, and are altogether oppoſite to him in that particular; thus many alſo may conſider a certain degree of reſignation to Providence in a time of calamity to be a branch of Chriſtian duty, and may fancy they follow Chriſt's example in this reſpect, while in fact perhaps they are much more influenced by an idea of it's being neceſſary to ſubmit to their fate; and as to that other temper of Chriſt which we coupled with willingneſs to ſuffer, I mean a willingneſs alſo to *do* the whole will of our heavenly Father, here they moſt lamentably fail: for do they look upon the doing of God's will, as Chriſt did, to be more neceſſary, as it were, than their daily meat, and do they count their time, their money, and their labor loſt except as it is devoted to God's ſervice, and employed for his glory? In truth, the whole example of Chriſt, when rightly underſtood, can neither be imitated nor approved by the common kind of worldly men; and indeed we all ſeem naturally to fall into diſpoſitions the moſt contrary to thoſe which characteriſ'd our Savior; for are men *naturally* humble, and lowly, and indifferent, as he was to worldly praiſe? Are they *naturally* prone to forgive injuries, and to love even their enemies, ſhewing their chief compaſſion alſo to the ſouls of thoſe whom they love? Are men *naturally* diſ-

poſed to renounce their own will, and to look only to the will of God? and are men *naturally* ſubmiſſive, and reſigned, and devoted altogether, to the Lord's ſervice? The corruption of our nature then is one of the leſſons which we learn by thus appealing to the example of Chriſt as the Touchſtone of real goodneſs, and when through the knowledge of this corruption we are humbled under the ſenſe of guilt, and are become anxious to find mercy, then, and not till then, we turn to our Savior's Croſs, and begin heartily to plead "the Propitiation" of that Son of God who "bare "our ſins in his own body on the tree," having "given his own life to be a ranſom for us."

The diſtance at which we find ourſelves from the great Standard of Perfection, and the difficulty which we ſoon begin to feel when we endeavour to copy after it, cannot fail to teach us another leſſon in Chriſtianity of the firſt importance: we are now taught, I mean, to "bow our "knees" before the God of all grace, imploring him "to help our infirmities," and to pour down upon us a portion of that ſpirit which was "given without meaſure" unto Chriſt; and thus do the ſeveral parts of Chriſtianity reflect mutual light on each other. He then is the true Chriſtian who, believing the doctrines of Chriſt, is alſo animated thereby to follow all the precepts of his maſter, who heartily approves and zealouſly copies after the bright example that is ſet before him, and who, by the help of Divine Grace, attains in his humble meaſure to ſome true reſemblance of his Savior.

1 AP 57

THE END.